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THE EDUCATION AND EFFICIENCY OF WOMEN¹

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WOMEN in modern production are a misfit. They are like the dog that puzzled the expressman in the classic story. "*He* don't know where he wants to go, and *we* don't know where he wants to go; he's eat his tag."

Is not this sense of misadjustment, of being astray, due to the fact that, industry being arranged to meet its end of private profits, human nature has to adjust itself as best it can to industrial conditions, instead of industrial conditions adjusting themselves to human nature? The troubles that result from this system make themselves felt everywhere, among men as well as women, but most seriously among the weakest competitors, and especially among wage-earning children and women.

My subject is education and efficiency, but I do not propose to go over the well-worn arguments to show that we ought at once to establish schools for trade training. It is now pretty generally understood that this is true. I want to raise a more far-reaching question—can women be economically efficient in production, production being organized as it now is?

The lives of both men and women have certain permanent aspects; whether in the stone age or in the twentieth century they must rear their descendants, they must between them produce material support for themselves and for the growing generation, they must lead their own personal lives and feed and discipline and "invite" their own souls and minds. There is always this trinity of their racial, their economic, and their inner life.

But while both men and women have this three-fold function, the differences in their racial life involve far-reaching economic consequences. Motherhood is an occupation as fatherhood is

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not, and this deeply affects woman's industry. Even in the primitive world, where industry is largely a household matter for all, woman's activity is bound to the hearthstone more closely than man's, for the bearing and rearing of children is intertwined with all her other business, and conditions it. This makes housework with all its ramifications and outlying branches the great feminine profession throughout the ages.

Consequently when industry, passing from the control of the worker to that of the owner of the business, assumed its modern specialized form and took work and workers out of the home into the factory and workshop, this change, carried out with no regard for the results on the workers themselves, affected the lives of women in ways which are not paralleled in those of men. Besides other consequences, it greatly lessened woman's efficiency both as mother and as worker.

Under the old régime there was an effective unity in women's lives, an organic harmony of function with function. The claims of motherhood and of work upon woman harmonized, because she herself was in control and arranged the conditions of her industry to fit her duties and disabilities as wife and mother. For herself and for her household she planned the various tasks with a view to strength, convenience and training for development. Besides the unity of motherhood and industry, there was unity of education and industry, of preparation and practise. The girl was essentially an apprentice of the housekeeper, whether mother or mistress. Her lessons were indistinguishable from her labor. From a little child she was working as well as learning, and also till she was at the head of her own home she was learning as well as working. Read Solomon's description, or even better, Xenophon's charming sketch in his *Economicus*, for a picture of feminine household industry on a rather large scale. We need not conceive this stage as ideal. The point is that there was a natural adjustment of work to worker which modern industry undermines in three ways—in separating work from the home, in separating work from education, and in shaping the conditions and concomitants of work without regard to the powers, tastes, or needs of the workers.

Before endeavoring to analyze these effects let us consider various types of modern women in whose lives all the different difficulties interact, shaping their fate, too often, in most strange and inharmonious fashion.

First let us take the professional woman. If she leads a single life she cuts the Gordian knot of the incompatibility of work and marriage. This is simple, certainly, but quite abnormal. While it is doubtless a happy solution in many cases, it is certainly undesirable that large numbers of women should adopt it, especially if we may suppose that a class of celibate professional women withdraw from the race the inheritance of some degree of picked intellectual ability. It has been argued, by Sidney Webb if I remember rightly, that the rule disqualifying married women for public-school teaching tends to keep a selected group of women out of marriage; a practical exclusion from marriage of women who succeed in medicine, law, architecture, art and business would be, from this point of view, at least an equally serious loss as regards quality if not quantity.

If a woman is able to combine professional activity with marriage and motherhood, as some have been so brilliantly successful in doing, this is because professional work is often more like the old housework than is factory work as regards elasticity and the possible adjustment of time and amount of work to personal convenience.

As our second group let us take well-to-do married women who command domestic service and nursery assistance. Such a woman has the maximum of freedom in ordering her own life, yet, even so, under the mould of the general situation, how chaotic her life history is likely to be. Suppose that she is at a finishing school till she "comes out" in society, or that she goes to college and at twenty-two comes home again to live, not choosing a professional career. Although she is only half conscious of the situation she practically waits for a few years to see whether or not marriage is to be her lot. Probably her natural mates are not yet financially able to offer marriage, and, again, more or less conscious of her rather humiliating situation, she becomes seriously and definitely interested in some specialized activity. By distinct preparation or simply by prac-

tise she fits herself for the work that she has found to do; then, just as she is well engaged in this work, the critical moment arrives and she marries. For some years her profession is motherhood, though this is the last thing for which she has thought of fitting herself; and then again her life takes a new turn. Her children are no longer children; they are at college or at work or married; or her daughter at home, perhaps without liking to say so, yearns to be intrusted with the home administration, for a while at least. Whether or not the mother resigns any of her housekeeping duties, motherhood is no longer a business that fills her days and gives adequate employment to her powers; again she seeks for occupation.

Such women, with the unmarried women of leisure, make the most disposable force in our society, but one very variously disposed. Some of them, the spenders, live purely parasitic lives, absorbing the services of others and consuming social wealth without rendering any return. Others, at the opposite extreme, perform work that is unpaid and that could not be paid for, work that demands experimentation, initiative and devotion. The work of a man or woman who combines with the chance gift of economic freedom the chance gift of genius consecrated to service—the work of a Charles Darwin, a William Morris, a Josephine Shaw Lowell, or a Jane Addams—is a pearl beyond price, but probably common people (that is, most of us) work better under a reasonable degree of pressure.

Our next social class is the married women who do their own work, as we say. For them life retains in the main its primitive harmony, except that they are less likely than women of old to come to their life work adequately prepared to carry on a household on the highest plane practicable with the resources available under contemporary conditions.

Our last class is the working women. The woman who does her own work is not, in the curious development of our phraseology, a working woman, though we may believe that the mother of a brood of children for whom she cleans, cooks, sews, washes and nurses does some work. On the other hand, the working woman is not, in our common phrase, occupied in "doing her own work," and truly, the work at which she is set might appear

to be almost anybody's rather than hers, if its unsuitability to her needs and powers is any criterion. While her school, however imperfect it may have been, was designed to meet her needs, was administered with the object of advancing her interests, her workshop, on the contrary, seeks quite a different end—the owner's profits. If she prospers or suffers through its conditions, that is a wholly alien consideration. The work is not her own, both because the product is not hers and because the conditions under which the work is carried on have no relation to her needs.

The education of the girl who is to enter industry generally fails as yet, however well intended, to fit her effectively for her working career. Most working girls, indeed, leave school at fourteen, when they are in any case too young to be efficient. Then come the proverbial wasted years of casual and demoralizing employment, till at eighteen or so the young workers find their footing and for five years, it may be, rank as working women. Then to most of them comes marriage. They entered industry untrained, now they enter married life untrained, if not unfitted, for such life, and at a less adaptable age than earlier. To a considerable extent the economic virtues of the factory are virtues that the girl cannot carry over into her housework, and its weaknesses are weaknesses that lessen her success as wife and mother. Industry tends to unfit her for home making if it tends to make her a creature of mechanical routine, unused to self-direction, unplastic, bored by privacy and not bored by machine monotony; if it accustoms her to an inapplicable scale and range of expenditure which assigns too much money to clothes (which are necessary to the status and earning power of the worker as they are not to mothers and children) and too little to adequate nourishment which, important to the adult, is fundamental to the health of children. Worst of all, the employments of working women tend, as has now been shown, more commonly and more seriously than has been at all generally understood, to unfit women, nervously and physically, for bearing children.

When we try to disentangle the confusions illustrated in these varying types of lives we see that one of the main causes of

trouble is the fact that modern industry is largely incompatible, while work lasts, with the functions of wife and mother or that at least it militates against them. We have seen some of the ways in which this simple fact of the incompatibility of two fundamental functions distracts and deforms women's lives.

A result of this divorce of industrial and married life is the fact that it is impossible to predict whether a given girl will spend her life in the home or in the working world, commercial, industrial or professional, and that consequently she commonly fails to prepare for either. We have indeed some professional training, some business training, and are just beginning to have some trade training; training for the home vocations has hardly got commonly beyond some cooking and sewing in the grades—most desirable as far as it goes. In Utopia, I dare say that every girl when she becomes engaged to be married, receives, besides her general education and her trade training, six months of gratuitous and compulsory vocational preparation for homemaking, and that this training for the bride, and a course in the ethics and hygiene of marriage for both bride and groom, is there required before a marriage license can be issued; moreover, I imagine that there every woman expecting her first child is given a scholarship providing instruction and medical advice for some months before and after the child is born, the conditions depending upon individual circumstances. In the real world some of our grossest evils are related to the lack of preparation for the most vital relations of life. Uncertainty as to her vocation not only prevents a girl's being trained for either household or industrial life, but it makes her a most destructive element in competitive wage earning. She does not care to make herself efficient in industry, for she hopes soon to marry, and meanwhile the semi-self-supporting woman drags down the pay of women wholly dependent on their own earnings and also that of men, perhaps including that of the man who might marry her but cannot afford it, thus increasing the chances against her in the lottery of marriage.

While this conflict between the call to industry and the call to marriage confuses women's lives but not men's, the divorce of education from practise is much the same for men and for

women both in its grounds and in its results. And first as to the causes.

Industry being organized by the employer for his own purposes, the worker is regarded simply as a means to the commercial end of maximum cheapness of production. This cheapness is attained, or at any rate has been commonly supposed to be attained, by the maximum of specialization and the maximum of routine and uniformity. The specialization of functions has appeared to the employer to make any education of the worker unnecessary and to make it possible to eliminate from the workshop the costly and troublesome business of teaching the trade, a policy that has had consequences to industry and citizenship that we are just beginning to realize. Up to this time the school has not averted these consequences by creating an effective substitute for apprenticeship. In the old days it could properly devote itself to academic branches, and even today, largely as a matter of habit inherited from those days, schooling continues as a general thing to have no bearing on the productive labor that the pupils engage in later, but is wholly general, with the marked defects as well as the merits of education of this type.

Not only has industrial training thus fallen between two stools, having been dropped from the workroom and not undertaken by the school, but the whole program of general education is controlled by the industrial situation. The routine and uniformity of modern production mean that the worker must work at the standard pace for the standard number of hours or drop out. This is less true of piece work, at least in theory; in practise the worker's need of money is likely to force the pace and stretch the hours to the limit of possibility. As regards occupation it is all or nothing; the employer will not accept workers who cannot give themselves entire. This is, I think, the element of truth in the emphasis of socialists on their thesis that the worker sells not his labor, but his labor power. So children once surrendered to competitive industry are surrendered altogether and for good—they are absorbed and exhausted.

Because work is so organized that it is not fit for young people immature in body and mind and that they are not fit for it, we

keep them out of all real work until we are ready to have them do nothing but work. And conversely, until they go to work once for all they are occupied with schooling and schooling only. Consequently life is broken into great indigestible lumps—first all study, then all work,—into unrelated phases which fail mutually to strengthen each other. Work and study ought to go on together, work beginning in the kindergarten years and education continuing to the end of life or at least so long as the mind remains receptive.

When boys and girls are needed to help at home while they are getting their schooling the situation is more natural, and if the child is not under too much pressure, better. But the child of the tenement or the fashionable apartment house cannot get this training in helpful labor parallel with his schooling as does the boy on the farm. So all work is postponed till school days are over and all schooling stops when work begins. One result is that some of us are busy teaching subjects fit only for mature minds to immature boys and girls on the assumption that they will never have another chance at education. I was once in a French boarding-school where the pupils learned by heart critical estimates of classical authors whom they had not read. On my questioning the practise I was told that though these sentences were not intelligible now they would recur to the pupils' minds when in later life they read the authors in question.

We need to study the psychology of intellectual hunger and the history of the ripening of the human mind. Surely there should be opportunities for the mature to study history, economics, politics, natural science, religion, literature and philosophy,—opportunities, I mean, for intervals of continuous, intensive study by those inclined to it, not solely opportunities for weary, sleepy men and women in fag ends of time to hear lectures or to prepare for examinations.

In work planned as employers have planned it not only is education eliminated from employment and employment deferred to the close of the generally meager period of education, but the advantage of the individual is disregarded in the arrangement of the work, to the great disadvantage of the worker and the community at large, if not, in the first instance, of the employer.

One of the effects of this is the waste or misuse of all laborers, like the married woman or child, who cannot give standard work under standard conditions. In the work of the school or the household, which is planned with reference to the worker, there is room for the delicate, the dull, the special student, the child and the elderly person. No one is unemployable, no portion of strength or capacity is unusable. In the factory of the Amana community, which is conducted, as one might say, on family principles, I was struck by the large number of really old men at the looms. Those who can no longer endure the hot work in the hay fields find occupation here, and those who can advantageously work irregularly for a few hours a day, but not more, are given the employment that they are fit for and that is good for them. This capacity to use all available labor power is one reason, perhaps, why the Amana communists wax richer year by year and hire outside workers to do much of their hardest work; perhaps, too, it makes for a happier and longer, because more occupied, old age.

But in competitive employment workers who are below the standard, if not excluded and therefore wasted, are likely to be forced to conform to unsuitable hours and working arrangements. Moreover they are likely to drag down wages and to render more difficult the attempts of the normal workers to improve conditions. The standard minimum wage, with provision of "sub-minimum" wage scales for the handicapped, seems the only device to prevent their destructive effect on wage standards. As regards children, society adopts the policy of complete withdrawal from industry, not because it is good for a child to spend all his time in schooling, but because, as has been said, industry will not adapt its routine to juvenile requirements, and precludes almost all chance for education after work is once entered upon.

As regards married women in industry, the situation is much the same as the situation with regard to children. They should stay out wholly because it is disastrous to the family for them to go in wholly and unreservedly, because their subsidized competition is likely to be injurious, and finally because the conditions of work are apt to be ruinous to their health. And

yet for women after marriage to abstain from all employment outside the household is often wasteful and altogether undesirable. If married women could work some hours a day, or some days a week, or some months a year, or some years and not others, as circumstances indicated (as they conceivably might do under a more elastic and adaptable organization of employment), and if they could do so without damage to wage standards or workshop discipline, it would seem advantageous, in more ways than one, for them not to drop out of industry at marriage. Both marriage and employment might become sufficiently universal to make it usual to train every girl for both, at least in a general way. If marriage did not appear to girls (quite fallaciously in most cases) as a way of getting supported without working, their interest in increasing their earning power would be greater; if wives were normally and properly contributors in some degree to the money income of the family, marriage would be more general and, above all, earlier, especially if the giving of allowances to mothers, of which Mr. Wells dreams, ever came into practice.

All this troubling of the waters of life is so familiar that it is perhaps not possible for us fully to appreciate or understand it. The conditions can doubtless be much ameliorated, but no reforms can make right a system that sins in its foundations. As has been said, the system sins because it puts production before people, with the results, so far as women are concerned, that we have seen. Two of the fundamental parts of their activity are made almost incompatible, so that we have unmarried workers and unworking wives, and workers and wives alike untrained because of the paralyzing uncertainty of the future. Moreover, men and women alike suffer from the separation of education and work, which makes work dull and education unreal and gives to the boy and girl more lessons than they can digest and to the man and woman too few; they both suffer also, if not equally, from the industrial system which shapes all the conditions of industrial life to ends extraneous to the welfare of the workpeople.

That our lives are made thus to fit the convenience of industry, not industry to fit the convenience of human lives, is

historically explicable and even justifiable. So long as there is difficulty in getting the bare necessities of living every other consideration must give way. The overriding object must be the amount of product, not comfort or development by the way. Health and happiness are then a necessary sacrifice to mammon. They are luxuries which the poverty-stricken do not afford themselves. Moreover, to do things pleasantly, or even to do them in the way that is most economical and effective in the long run requires not only capital but a social direction of capital that can be the fruit only of a long and painful evolution. Because our industry is conducted piecemeal by dividend hunters it is carried on, if we regard it as a whole, in a near-sighted and extravagant way. Above all, it wastes talent and physical stamina, beside devastating the private happiness of employes, and nowhere is it more uneconomical than in its use of women's strength and capacity and, above all in its wastage of her health.

We are just on the eve of being socially conscious enough to perceive these things and prosperous enough to afford a different policy. Is it insane to hope that in the fulness of time industry will be so arranged as to advance human life by its process as well as by its produce; to hope that we shall have, as one might say, a maternal government acting on the principles of the mother of a great and busy household who makes education and work coöperate throughout, who cares for her family and economizes and develops their powers and makes their complete welfare her controlling object? My contention is that while we cannot make women efficient in any complete sense under conditions which so militate against their efficiency, we can make them less and less inefficient as we shape education to that end, and as we get increasing control of industrial conditions in the interests of human life in its wholeness.